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ABSTRACT

In May 1983, the Georgia Board of Education identified six tasks to be pursued in an attempt to improve education in the public schools: (1) strengthen high school graduation requirements; (2) establish statewide promotion guidelines for at least one grade in elementary school (the 3rd grade was chosen); (3) implement merit or differential pay for teachers; (4) identify basic curriculum content in each elementary grade and high school subject; (5) upgrade administrative leadership; and (6) simplify teacher certification. The tasks are described in this bulletin and action taken so far to accomplish them is reported. (JD)

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Action Plan for Education in Georgia

Georgia Department of Education

Introduction

Groundwork for the Georgia Department of Education *Action Plan for Education* was laid during the final months of 1982, when the Georgia Board of Education and staff of the state school superintendent examined areas for possible improvement in Georgia public education. Several needs were identified, but completion of this action plan had to wait for appointments to the state board by newly elected Governor Joe Frank Harris. Governor Harris named four board members in early April and May 1983, allowing the full board then to focus on specific areas for education improvement.

At its May 1983 meeting the Georgia Board of Education identified six tasks to be pursued in its attempt to improve the education of Georgia's youth. These included the following.

One	Strengthen high school graduation requirements
Two	Establish statewide promotion guidelines for at least one grade in elementary school
Three	Implement merit or differential pay for teachers
Four	Identify basic curriculum content in each elementary grade and high school subject
Five	Upgrade administrative leadership
Six	Simplify teacher certification

In this *Action Plan for Education*, the tasks are described in the context of specific recommendations set forth by the National Commission on Excellence in Education Report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* A number of existing programs and methods are also related to the quest for excellence in education in Georgia.

Recommendation One

High school graduation requirements should be more rigorous.

Georgia's Action Plan

This recommendation of the National Commission on Excellence is addressed directly by the Georgia Board of Education in its Task One: Review and strengthen high school graduation requirements. Revised requirements were adopted by the state board at its November 1983 meeting. The old and new requirements are as follows.

High School Graduation Requirements

Current		Proposed	
English language arts	3	English language arts	4
Mathematics	1	Mathematics	2
Science	1	Science	2
Science or mathematics	1	Social studies	3
Social studies	1	Two units from American studies	
U.S. history/government	1	One unit from world studies	
Personal finance	1/3	Health, safety and physical education	1
Health and safety	1/3		
Physical education	1/3	Computer technology, fine arts or vocational education	1
Career planning	1/3		
Economics/business/ free enterprise	1/3		
Citizenship	1/3		
State required units	10	State required units	13
Locally required units or electives	10	Locally required units or electives	8
Total units required	**20**	**Total units required**	**21**

These changes represent an increase in the total number of required basic courses (13 units as opposed to 10 units) as well as an increase in the total number of units required for graduation (21 rather than 20).

Status

New high school requirements are effective for seniors in 1988 (ninth graders enrolling in fall 1984.) Georgia graduation requirements are now exceeded by only three other states, and any local system may require more than 21 units for graduation.

College Preparation

Specific recommendations have also been made by the Georgia Board of Education and the State Board of Regents as to required study for collegebound students. These include the following.

Required Areas of Study	Carnegie Units	Instructional Emphasis
English language arts	4	Grammar and usage Literature (American, English and world) Advanced composition skills
Science	3	Physical science At least two laboratory courses in biology, chemistry or physics
Mathematics	3	Courses in algebra, geometry or advanced mathematics
Social science	3	Two units must be from the American studies area (one in American history/government; one in citizenship education and economics). One unit must be from from the world studies area.
Foreign language	2	Skill building courses emphasizing speaking, listening, reading and writing
Health, safety and physical education	1	Comprehensive health course focusing on decision making for life Physical education course focusing on physical fitness for lifetime sports

Computer technology, fine arts or vocational education	1	Computer literacy or more advanced course Dance, drama, music, visual arts Agriculture education, business education, marketing and distributive education, home economics education, industrial arts education, trade and industrial education

State required units	17
Electives	4
Total Units Required	**21**

Additional courses from among the following are also strongly recommended.

- Trigonometry
- A third year of foreign language or study in a second foreign language
- Physical and health education
- Vocational education
- An additional laboratory course in science
- Computer technology
- Fine arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts)

Status

The precollege curriculum required by the Board of Regents for admission to the University System is effective for ninth graders this fall, who will be the graduating class of 1988.

Recommendation Two

There should be more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct.

Georgia's Action Plan

This recommendation was addressed by the Georgia Board of Education in Task Two: Establish statewide promotion guidelines for at least one grade in elementary school, and Task Four: Identify basic curriculum content in each elementary grade and high school subject.

Third Grade Promotion Standard

The board surveyed local educators statewide before setting the promotion gate at the third grade on their recommendation. In spring 1984 the board adopted a policy requiring that third graders must pass a state criterion-referenced test in reading and mathematics before being promoted to fourth grade. The General Assembly has appropriated funds for test development and administration.

The third grade promotion standard and test will complement the existing student testing program, which currently evaluates student achievement on two types of tests at the first, fourth, eighth and 10th grades.

Statewide Testing Program

Criterion-referenced tests are given in reading and mathematics at the first, fourth and eighth grades, and basic skills tests are administered to 10th grade students as part of the statewide graduation requirement. Career development tests are given in the fourth and eighth grades. These test results are used by teachers to measure individual students' strengths and weaknesses in basic skills and to plan programs of study to meet individual needs. The fourth and eighth grade tests were initially administered in 1980. Since that time Georgia students have improved their achievement every year. On the 10th grade tests,

92.8 percent and 95.1 percent of the students tested passed the mathematics and reading sections, respectively, in fall 1983. Students who fail the initial test may retake it in the 11th and 12th grades and are given remedial help to improve their performance.

Writing skills are also required of high school students as part of the state board's graduation policy adopted in 1980 and revised in 1984. Funds to develop the writing portion of the High School Basic Skills Tests were appropriated in 1984, and plans are to administer the test on a pilot basis in fall 1985. Another pilot test is planned for 1986-87, with 10th grade students taking the Basic Skills Tests in fall 1987 required to pass the writing as well as the reading and mathematics tests to graduate.

Norm-referenced tests (the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) are also given in the fourth, eighth and 10th grades. Georgia students in each grade have made steady improvements since testing began in 1976. Achievement is now at the national norm for each grade tested.

Status

The third grade promotion test has been developed and will be administered statewide in spring 1985 to all third graders on a pilot basis. Third graders taking the test in spring 1986 must pass it to be promoted to the fourth grade.

Georgia's Statewide Testing Program will continue with the introduction of the new third grade test in spring 1986 and the writing test for 10th graders in fall 1987. Tests then will be required of all students in grades one, three, six, eight and 10. Tests will be optional in kindergarten and grades four and five. No statewide tests are given in grades seven and nine.

Uniform Curriculum Content

Another Georgia effort directed at the recommendation for more rigorous and measurable standards is the state board's uniform curriculum content. Developed during the 1983-84 school year, it specifies content for every course at every grade level. With the use of this curriculum, a first in the nation, Georgia schools and systems will be assuring consistency in both quality and content of instruction for students all over the state.

Status

The basic curriculum content will be available to schools during the 1984-85 school year. After a period of field-testing and comment, the course content and expectations will become state board policy to be followed by all Georgia schools.

Excellence Recognition

The state board also emphasizes higher expectations for academic achievement through its Excellence Recognition Program honoring outstanding programs, individual achievements and efforts in a variety of areas.

The Georgia Scholar Program annually identifies and recognizes public high school seniors who have achieved excellence in school and community life.

A ceremony is conducted at each monthly board meeting to honor individuals and programs in the following areas: health and physical education; vocational education (secondary and postsecondary); art, music, drama and dance; scholarship; science, mathematics, social studies and driver education; special olympics and special art; school and community nutrition services; school/system management; media services; leadership; language arts and foreign languages; teaching and school-community relations.

The department of education and the state board also honor excellence in school programs through the School Excellence Recognition Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This program was conducted for the first time during the 1983-84 school year. In addition to the national program,

which focuses on middle and secondary schools, Georgia identified and recognized outstanding elementary programs.

Status

During the 1983-84 school year the Georgia Department of Education and the state board honored 247 Georgia Scholars and 29 Schools of Excellence. Five of these were named National Schools of Excellence. Excellence medallions and plaques were presented in the 24 curriculum and program areas at monthly board meetings. All three excellence recognition programs are to be continued during 1984-85.

Recommendation Three

More time should be devoted to learning the new basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day or a lengthened school year.

Georgia's Action Plan

Georgia's school year currently is funded for 180 days, six hours per day in grades four through 12 and 4½ hours in grades one through three. Kindergarten is state-funded for only one-half day, although most systems add local funds to offer a full day. Georgia Board of Education Standards require that the minimum school day and school year be strictly observed, and exceptions must be approved by the board.

More Time on Instruction

The state board specifically addresses this recommendation in its courses (English, mathematics, science and social studies) while reducing the number of electives. In addition, the board has developed a policy which mandates a minimum 170 school days devoted entirely to instruction. The effect would be to limit school-sanctioned noninstructional activities such as assemblies, pep rallies and field trips, to seven calendar days for students. The school may use three additional days per year for administrative purposes such as registration and orientation. The state board has also adopted a test Standard requiring each student to be scheduled a minimum of five hours of class instruction per day.

Status

The policy on use of instructional time is being field-tested during the 1984-85 school year. The board will assess the results and make its final decision for the 1985-86 school year. Also, the board's new graduation policy requires that a student study one year of either computer science, arts or vocational education.

Technology Task Force

In another effort to strengthen education in the new basics, the Georgia Department of Education has initiated a Technology Task Force to study the applications and implications of high technology for education in Georgia.

The study group proposed that a multifaceted approach be used to deal with curriculum, organization, management and professional preparation at every level — public elementary and secondary schools, the Georgia Department of Education and other education agencies. The major purposes are as follows.

- To prepare Georgia's students to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing society and specifically to deal with those aspects of the culture affected by the technology revolution and information explosion.
- To prepare education professionals at all levels to modify the school environment, curriculum, methods and techniques in ways that most appropriately meet the needs of students in the future.

Status

A State Advisory Council for Educational Technology has met to identify education technology issues the state needs to address. The department's task force has conducted staff development in computer technology for 2,500 local and state educators at the Macon Pilot Staff Development and Demonstration Center, and state staff have provided workshops for 5,000 local educators. The FY86 budget package of the state board includes $3.5 million for education technology in schools and systems, including incentive grants, training grants for teachers and administrators, staff development centers, a state media/materials center, curriculum materials and a statewide electronic network.

Continuing Technology Efforts

Several existing programs within the department of education also respond to state and local education technology needs, including Georgia's high technology program in vocational education, the Georgia Software Library, the Georgia Library

Information Network and a computer consultant available for technical assistance and instructional television. Plans are under *consideration to consolidate and coordinate all such state* initiatives in technology and information.

Governor's Education Review Commission

An important Georgia response to the emphasis on the new basics is the Education Review Commission appointed by Georgia Governor Joe Frank Harris. Its charge is to define a quality basic education program and to recommend ways to implement it. The commission is composed of individuals from all backgrounds, including department of education staff, and is organized into five committees during the fact finding phase.

Definition Committee

This committee has the responsibility to define a statewide quality basic education. The members are making an in-depth study of existing curricular content as well as identifying the basic skills and knowledge students need to acquire during their schooling.

Service Delivery Committee

This committee is to propose organizational and service modifications which will enhance the effectiveness and/or efficiency of the state public elementary and secondary education enterprise. The committee is studying existing services and organizational structures to identify factors which foster or inhibit effective service delivery, particularly instruction.

Personnel Committee

This committee is to propose changes in the development, evaluation and management of school personnel, particularly teachers and administrators, which will enhance their effectiveness in their respective roles and responsibilities. Members are studying preparation for job-entry, recruitment and selection, continued education, performance evaluation and incentive opportunities of school personnel.

Funding Committee

This committee is to propose changes in the funding of public elementary and secondary schools which will enhance their effectiveness and efficiency as well as ensure equity of opportunity statewide for a quality basic education. The committee members are studying projected revenue resources

and future demand upon them, levels of personnel compensation and current state allocation procedures. They are attempting to identify factors contributing to inequity of opportunity among school systems and aspects of funding which foster or inhibit effective and efficient use of limited fiscal resources.

Comparative Analysis Committee

This committee's responsibility is to compare the state's public education policies and practices with those of other states, particularly southeastern and neighboring states, in an effort to identify effective approaches which might be adopted in Georgia. The members are making an in-depth study of the purpose statements, curricula, programs, financing and evaluation efforts of other states as well as approaches used by selected school systems recognized nationally as outstanding.

Status

The Education Review Commission appointed in 1983 by Governor Harris is expected to make its full report by October 1984. Following a period for public comment, the Governor will compile a budget package for the 1985 legislature to consider for fiscal year 1986.

In a year of study thus far, subcommittees of the review commission have adopted positions supporting most of the current improvement initiatives of the Georgia Board of Education: raising high school graduation requirements to 21, endorsing a rigorous preparatory program for collegebound students, adopting a uniform curriculum for all schools and every course at every grade level, continuing the Performance-based Teacher Certification program and extending the kindergarten program to full-day.

The commission has developed and published a list of 77 competencies students should have when they graduate from Georgia public schools; it has proposed setting up alternative or in-school suspension programs for disruptive students, and it has given preliminary approval to a weighted per pupil formula for funding Georgia public education.

Recommendation Four

Improve the preparation of teachers and make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession.

Georgia's Action Plan

The state board addresses this recommendation through several ongoing and successful activities that predate the national commission.

Performance-based Teacher Certification

A significant effort to improve the quality of teaching was initiated in 1978 in Georgia with the development and implementation of the nation's first Performance-based Teacher Certification Program. This program requires new teachers to complete an approved four-year college program, to pass a content test in their teaching field and to demonstrate teaching ability through an on-the-job assessment in order to be issued a renewable teaching certificate. Teachers have one year to pass the Teacher Certification Knowledge Test and three years in which to meet performance requirements. This program was developed with major input from the experienced teachers of the state. Implementation of the on-the-job assessment phase of the program involves experienced teachers who are specifically trained and subsequently obtain special certification to function as data collectors in evaluating the on-the-job performance of beginning teachers.

Teacher Pay

Rewarding excellent teaching performance is a major concern of the Georgia Board of Education. Although Georgia's teachers statewide now are paid on the basis of their certificates and their experience, local school systems have the option to differentiate among teachers through local policy. Many designate lead or master teachers, and a few offer merit pay. In addition, beginning teachers who pass on-the-job assessemnt during the first year are promoted to the third step on the pay schedule at the start of their second year.

Status

Georgia is the first state in the nation to issue teaching certificates on the basis of classroom performance. During the five-year period the program has been in effect, more than 22,000 teacher applicants have taken the Teacher Certification Tests in 28 fields. Of the candidates taking the tests for the first time, 78 percent have succeeded; of the remainder retaking the test, 64 percent have passed, a rate higher than in any other state that tests teachers.

Two Georgia school districts, Dalton City and Gwinnett County, have differential or merit pay plans for teachers. Recommendations as to differential pay and/or a career ladder are expected from Governor Harris' Education Review Commission this fall.

Georgia teachers received the largest single raise in recent history this year, 10 percent across-the-board that brings the beginning salary of a teacher with a bachelor's degree and no experience to $14,329. Another 10 percent raise is proposed for FY86; the beginning salary if it is approved would be $15,763.

Teacher Preparation Institutions

An important step toward better teacher preparation was begun in 1983 with the Georgia Department of Education and the State Board of Regents working together to identify and improve undergraduate teacher education programs in the state's public colleges.

The department releases annually the mean scores of teacher education students on the Teacher Certification Test and the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument. Institutions whose students fall below a 70 percent passing rate are placed on probation by the regents and required to submit a remediation plan. Response from the colleges has been very positive; many have restructured their curriculums, are providing more staff development and are paying more attention to student results.

Teacher Certification

The State Board of Education has taken a major step to enhance the teaching profession in Georgia by streamlining its

certification procedures. The most important occurred in July 1983, when the board recognized the school personnel functions of teaching, leadership and service and approved issuing certificates according to these three types.

The teacher certification section itself has been reorganized so that evaluations are carried out according to level of difficulty. This means that the simpler the evaluation task, the more quickly it is handled. Most renewals, for example, take no longer than two weeks, and persons who complete an approved teacher education program and receive recommendation for certification from an authorized college official may be certified in a similar brief period.

Some operations have been transferred from the certification section itself to employers. These include issuing licenses for paraprofessionals and teacher aides, approval of experience according to Georgia Board of Education adopted criteria for certification and salary purposes and an alternative certification plan for vocational-technical school personnel. A new computer program is greatly improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of office operations.

Status

The Georgia Advisory Council on Education has been asked to study and develop recommendations related to the number of fields in which certificates are awarded by the state and to examine current requirements for teacher certification. A result of this study may be a reduction in the number of fields in which Georgia issues certificates. By combining these two operational aspects — improvement of internal operations of the teacher certification section and a review of requirements for certification and reduction of the number of fields in which certificates are issued — a simplification and streamlining of teacher certification will result.

Recommendation Five

Educators and elected officials should be held responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms.

Georgia's Action Plan

Recognizing the importance of leadership in the quest for excellence in education, the Georgia Board of Education is committed to upgrading administrative and instructional personnel in the state's schools. The board's Task Five: Upgrade administrative leadership, addresses this recommendation.

Leadership Training

A study of principals in Georgia conducted by the Professional Standards Commission reviewed the status of the state's leadership academy, studied certification of education leaders and programs for preparation of principals and reviewed other research related to public education. Using the results of this study, the state board identified several actions to effect improvement.

- Revise the criteria for leadership certificates.
- Establish a required seminar for all new administrative personnel, particularly building principals.
- Establish a system of performance evaluation and review by superintendents for building principals. The results would be used to determine the staff development needs for each principal.
- Establish mandatory continuing education requirements for individuals to maintain their leadership certificates.
- Expand the leadership academy to include more instructional leadership and managerial development courses.

Addressing the Teacher Shortage in Critical Fields

Georgia's system of certification allows the issuing of provisional teaching certificates, valid for a limited time, which can be used by local systems to obtain teachers in critical situations.

There are plans for incentives to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, particularly in areas of critical shortage. Georgia's legislature this year appropriated $135,000 in scholarship loans specifically to train mathematics and science teachers in Georgia colleges and universities beginning in the summer of 1984. By August 1, 96 teachers had used $99,178 of the scholarship money.

Using nonschool personnel resources is another option that could help to solve the immediate problem of the shortage of mathematics and science teachers in the state.

Status

Funds are requested in the FY86 budget of the Georgia Board of Education to greatly expand and upgrade the department of education's Academy for School Executives. Leadership training and staff development would be offered regularly through the academy to all vocational education administrators, curriculum directors, principals, superintendents and other leadership personnel. The training to be offered through this academy will address a number of the state board's recommendations, including the required seminars for all new administrative personnel and the mandatory continuing education requirements.

The department is also exploring ways to use the resources of business and industry in the development of school leaders' managerial skills. During August 1984 the department is cosponsoring with Georgia Power Company the first of a planned series of intensive one-week programs to train 20 school principals in business management techniques.

Criteria for leadership certificates are being revised by the Georgia Advisory Council on Education; recommendations are expected for implementation in July 1983.

Georgia public school standards currently require the evaluation of building principals, but formal systems are not being used in many school districts. The Governor's Review Commission is expected to make recommendations in this area.

Conclusion

Georgians have never been people to sit back and wait for someone else to come along and tell us what our problems are and solve them for us. We are **doers.** And we have been doing things to improve our education system for a long time. Long before the National Commission on Excellence in Education made its report, Georgia had begun to work toward education improvement at the state, district and school levels. But one of the things the report did was to make citizens, politicians and businesses realize that we cannot do it alone. Making better schools is their job too. Education excellence is everybody's business.

Today, education improvement in Georgia is well under way. We can see promising change and determination in every area of the state and at every level of responsibility.

Our reform efforts are comprehensive and thorough. As they are put into place, and as our state renews and increases its commitment of support and resources to public education, Georgians will see results.

They will see a more rigorous curriculum based on standardized course content and student expectations for every subject and grade level.

They will see more time spent on instruction — every day in every school in every system.

They will see an end to the promotion of elementary age students before they have learned the basic skills.

They will see high school graduates well-grounded in English, mathematics, science and social studies — ready for work or more schooling.

They will see top-notch teachers, thoroughly prepared in their teaching fields and able to show their teaching skills.

They will see a public education system fully capable of meeting its responsibilities for educating young people for productive, contributing, fulfilled lives.

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